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Bishop McGann and the mesmerized minds

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At first the comments by Bishop John McGann at the funeral of former CIA director William Casey seemed inappropriate. Instead of the traditional eulogy, Bishop McGann criticized Mr. Casey's support for the freedom fighters in Nicaragua. Such criticism, though, served the valuable purpose of heightening public awareness of the sense and nonsense in the raging debate over U.S. policy in Central America.

This focusing of public attention, although in the rather unusual setting of a funeral, came at a very opportune time. In Washington members of Congress were engaged in Iran-Contra hearings. While some in Washington continue to debate the wisdom of the administration's policy in Central America, the question of opposing communist encroachment was settled long ago in the mind of the late Arthur Koestler.

Following his transformation from an ardent Communist to an opponent of communism, Mr. Koestler wrote in his 1952 book, "Arrow in the Blue": "The well-meaning 'progressives of the Left' persist in following their old, outworn concepts. As if under the spell of a destructive compulsion, they must repeat every single error of the past, draw the same faulty conclusions a second time, relive the same situations, perform the same suicidal gestures. One can only watch in horror and despair, for this time, there will be no pardon."

As the hearings continued and America listened to members of Congress "repeat every single error of the past" while questioning policies designed to thwart the advancement of communism, I spoke to the former Polish ambassador to the United States, Romauld Spasowski. In December 1981, Mr. Spasowski was granted asylum in the United States and be-

came the highest-ranking Communist official ever to defect to the West.

Believing that no one understands the communist mind like a former Communist, I asked Mr. Spasowski what he thinks of liberal American attitudes about communism. "My experience and knowledge of the Soviets and of communism in general tell me very strongly that the Communist system is not reformable," said Mr. Spasowski. "It might be a little bit improved here and there as far as production is concerned, but it cannot change, because it is based on power, people's fear and also some illusions that the system will be modified."

It is these "illusions" that apparently have mesmerized Bishop McGann and some members of Congress.

Mr. Spasowski then offered an opinion which, stated by anyone else, would probably earn him the label "McCarthyite" or "Red-baiter": "The basic goal of communism is the domination of the world."

At the funeral, Bishop McGann said that Mr. Casey "must have thought us bishops blind to the potential for a communist threat in this hemisphere as we oppose the violence wrought in Central America by support of the Contras."

Yes, he thought you were blind, Bishop McGann. If your view of victims and oppressors had prevailed 200 years ago, we would all have British accents.

Speaking of those like Bishop McGann and such members of Congress as Democratic Reps. Ron Dellums of California and Jim Wright of Texas, who have been critical of U.S. policy in Central America, Mr. Spasowski said "they haven't any experience with communism. They are looking through their own glasses and using their own measuring sticks. Such people are easily misled by communist tactics."

The former ambassador says the Soviets are exploiting America's weaknesses, particularly its failure to develop a bipartisan foreign policy. He believes the current division over Nicaragua plays directly into the hands of Soviet policy-makers.

It might be easy to dismiss such talk from an "ultra-right-winger," as the press likes to label anyone to the right of Daniel Ortega, but coming from a man who spent most of his life as an ideological disciple of Marx and Lenin, such opinions are difficult to ignore.

In his book "The Liberation of One," Mr. Spasowski issues this critique of the West: "Soviet tyranny is long-lived and thriving, not because it is strong, but because the Free World has no solidarity of its own to combat it."

The soap opera now being played out on Capitol Hill must not be allowed to impede the legitimate pursuit of U.S. policy in Central America.

Attention must be given to the serious threat so near our southern border, a threat seen quite clearly by the former Polish ambassador and apparently not by the many blind mice in Congress.

Cal Thomas is a nationally syndicated columnist.